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**Oral History Project
Interview Transcript**

**Roberta Gernhardt
Interviewed by Linda Arntzenius
September 18, 2017**

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Linda Arntzenius: I'm here at the Institute with long-serving member of staff Roberta Gernhardt [former Manager of Human Resources] who served under no less than four Institute directors, during a time of considerable change. First of all thank you for participating in the project. And as you know the focus of the interview is the Institute and your time here—your job responsibilities, the challenges and achievements, the people you encountered, and any anecdotes that you care to share. But first before we get to the Institute's workings and culture, I wonder if you could share perhaps a little bit about yourself, your childhood, where you grew up, and what your parents did for a living.

Roberta Gernhardt: Fine. I grew up in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. My father had been in the War and was one of the returning veterans and an original resident with my mother of Levittown, Pennsylvania. And so I grew up there. I went to Penn State University. I put myself through college. I was the first family member to go to college. But my parents, my mother was a homemaker and my father was a business machine repairperson; so [it was] a very modest background in terms of affordability of college. So I chose the state university and never regretted it.

Linda Arntzenius: Did you have any siblings?

Roberta Gernhardt: One sister who is four and a half years younger than I am and still lives locally. Yes, so it was a small family.

I was editor of my high school newspaper, editor-in-chief, so I studied both English and journalism when I went to Penn State. And I did a little bit of writing for the local newspaper, feature writing when I first graduated, but realized that it was not the career path for me.

My father having been a traveling business machine repairman always told me, "Look at Princeton University. They always seem to be such a good employer." So I started at Princeton about a year out of college and ended up in the HR [Human Resources] department there and was mentored by a few different people and found I enjoyed it. I was good enough that I could make a career out of it.

Linda Arntzenius: So what exactly is HR? What were your responsibilities there at the University?

Roberta Gernhardt: When I was first at the University – I came in actually as a support staff member and I handled, if you can believe it, for 4000 employees, their entire temporary disability and worker's comp. program. So people who were on leave I'd be in touch with and make sure that they were getting the right medical appointments and following up to see when they would be coming back, getting medical releases to get them back onto the job. So that's where I started and then I was promoted to do some general interviewing sort of people who walked in the door. It was all before email and computers.

Linda Arntzenius: Oh yes, lots of paper files.

Roberta Gernhardt: And then I happened to get into benefits. there was an opening and that was actually my last job at the University was Manager of Benefits so I reported to a director there, but did a lot of the negotiating with insurance companies and did a lot of public speaking across campus, actually both campuses, the, plasma physics labs as well. And that's where my husband and I met actually. And then I had a baby.

Linda Arntzenius: That was in 1982 I understand.

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes, mm-hmm.

Linda Arntzenius: Is that your only child?

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes, your daughter.

Roberta Gernhardt: Mm-hmm.

Linda Arntzenius: And what's her name?

Roberta Gernhardt: Alison.

Linda Arntzenius: Okay. So in 1982 you have your daughter. By 1985 you're at the Institute so fill that time in for me. How did that go?

Roberta Gernhardt: So I did, some consulting for the University for about a year and a half, because they were setting up their own HR benefits office on the plasma physics campus. So they had hired somebody and I would spend maybe 20 hours a week for – on and off, it was intermittent - but for about a year and a half. My former boss at the University at one point in my career over there was Jim Barbour. Jim had come over to the Institute at some point, uh, maybe five years earlier. He was recruited by Allen Rowe, who had worked with Jim's father. You know it's all who knows who.

Linda Arntzenius: Allen Rowe had worked at the University I understand.

Roberta Gernhardt: Plasma physics, yes. He worked at plasma physics. He was the general manager I guess in plasma physics. But he had come over to the Institute quite a number of years prior, actually recruited by Hedi Selberg,¹ who was Atle Selberg's² wife. She was in computing at, at Forrestal and suggested that he [Allen Rowe] come and look at the opening over here. So anyway, little bit of history.

Linda Arntzenius: Right, and Jim Barbour had also been recruited from...

¹ Hedvig (Hedi) Selberg (1919-1995), Electronic Computer Project staff, 1950-1957.

² Alte Selberg (1917-2007), Member in the School of Mathematics, 1947-1951; Professor, 1951-1987, Emeritus Professor, 1987-2007.

- Roberta Gernhardt:* From the main campus HR over to the Institute and he became – I guess his title was Manager of Administration so he wasn't really doing HR so much but, you know, all of the building and sort of Allen's right-hand person...
- Linda Arntzenius:* Right and who was doing HR at that time? Whose job did you come to fill?
- Roberta Gernhardt:* So there was a woman, Barbara Roudabush, and Barbara, had been, I think, had sort of worked her way up and I think that that was very common for a lot of HR operations; they start small, somebody who's got some talent. She had moved on I think to Recording for the Blind by then so the position was open. Jim actually had been in touch with me but I still had a young child so they were willing to make it part-time for the first few years.
- Linda Arntzenius:* They wanted you!
- Roberta Gernhardt:* Yes, yes, which was very nice. And so until my daughter was in kindergarten I was a part-timer working 25 to 30 hours a week.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Did she go to Crossroads?
- Roberta Gernhardt:* No. Crossroads at that time was only part-time, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.
- Linda Arntzenius:* We'll talk more about Crossroads a little later but I wanted to ask you what personal qualities did you have that made you a good fit for the Institute?
- Roberta Gernhardt:* Well I guess I'm not so sure at the beginning I might have been such a good fit. You grow into it. And it's interesting, when I came up here today - you forget how gorgeous the campus is, not that I – I always appreciated but I didn't take notice of it as I did walking in today. I think one of the – I'll just start with what the difference was between the University and the Institute. I thought it was going to be very similar, an educational institution, top tier, brilliant people, but it was so different in that there was an intimacy then at the Institute, there still is now. At the University I was one of thirty HR people.
- I was *it* when I came here and that's good and bad. It takes some getting used to. So I think it did take me a little while to sort of figure out that the personal relationships with everyone here were very important, and an important piece of being good at HR.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Right. So size, the size of the institution was a different order of magnitude from the University.
- Roberta Gernhardt:* Absolutely.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Were there any other things that may have surprised you about the place?

Roberta Gernhardt: And I think it goes along with the size, it was how involved spouses of faculty were in – well for instance going back to Crossroads, they were the ones who started Crossroads and they were still very involved in Crossroads and that's just one example. So when people refer to the Institute as a "Community of Scholars" it truly is because it's a true community. It's the families, it's the extended families. I came to love that about the Institute but it was different; it was different.

Linda Arntzenius: Did that extend – that family feeling - did that extend to the workforce?

Roberta Gernhardt: I think, over time, yes. The workforce of the Institute, and I don't want to get choked up, but they are - I think were and still are amazing individuals. People would ask me, we would have a consultant come in and do a training program or would speak about something and they'd ask me later, "Well what kind of training programs do you do here to instill the sense of camaraderie and support?" and I'd say, "Not really anything." There's something about the Institute; everyone helped one another, everyone supported one another. I mean there were little tiffs here and there, February was always a month when I think everybody had had it with winter and I'd have more sort of bickering going on between staff that sometimes I'd have to intercede, but generally an extraordinarily supportive environment. They all knew what their role was.

Linda Arntzenius: Right, right. Do you – have you thought about that over the years as to why that is? Has it something, anything at all to do with the founders' vision for this place?

Roberta Gernhardt: I don't know. I mean I think one of the things that I saw at the very beginning and I hope it is still true today is the devotion that the faculty had as well to this place. And so you sort of look to the faculty as your leaders and it was easy to just sort of follow that. I don't know whether it relates to the founders' vision but it truly is and remains a community.

Linda Arntzenius: Mm-hmm. So when you were – I'm kind of jumping ahead here but when you were looking to hire people was there some particular quality that you looked for that made them a good fit for this place?

Roberta Gernhardt: Mm-hmm. One of the things I would stress is the size of the institution, making sure that they were aware of that. You do develop very personal relationships, but also the importance in this institution and I think in a lot of academic institutions, but very much so here of consensus building. I can remember when the computing group was first starting, we had a few people who were very talented, they knew their thing, and they just wanted to implement new systems – without consultation. And it ended up being deadly for them because it did not work.

Linda Arntzenius: So these are individuals who were hired but fired or let go?

Roberta Gernhardt: Sometimes, sometimes because it just – they didn't get the culture and you know – I would try to counsel them through, "Well, you know, you did

it this way. Maybe you could've done it this way, or what have we learned, or..." and sometimes there was a learning curve and it worked out great. And sometimes it didn't. But that was one of the tougher periods as we were staffing up over a number of years in computing, because I – I think in part because technology changes so fast it would be difficult for some of the managers to want to sort of "waste that time" building consensus but it remained important.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes. And would you say that was a *particular* challenge of the Institute as compared to the University?

Roberta Gernhardt: I think the challenge goes back to the size here at the Institute. You do not have other colleagues often times that you can bounce ideas off of or brainstorm with. I would reach out to – I still had friends at the University and I developed new friends over the years that I could bounce ideas off of, same as at the Seminary, I did the same thing. So I think that that became important for most managers here to develop a relationship either with peers here if there were any or external contacts to sort of remain professionally – in touch and – and you know just sort of bounce ideas off of them.

Linda Arntzenius: Mm-hmm. So that was going to be one of my questions. As an HR person you get a lot of people coming to you for advice and I wanted to know who did you go to? Was there any particular person, we're covering a lot of years here, perhaps it changed over the years, but was there any individual or individuals that you found very supportive in your role?

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes. I would always say Jim Barbour was extremely supportive and again we had worked together for a few years at the University and then he left. Then, in later years, towards the end of my career, John Masten [Associate Director for Finance and Administration] was amazing. He wants everyone to win and it's interesting working with a person like that who doesn't take sides but is extraordinarily supportive. His background was so deep, he had wonderful recall of every piece of his own career that he could bring, so he was a great support. Amazing.

Linda Arntzenius: And how did your own skills develop over your time here?

Roberta Gernhardt: I was lucky that at the University, although I was only there seven years I had been exposed to employment, so I went through interviewing classes with them and then kept up with that. I was one of the co-writers of their original affirmative action plan.

You know I was sort of an extra staff person and I worked with the provost and the head of personnel. I became Manager of Benefits before I left there so I was really exposed to benefits. So I really had a very good starting point. And then I was part of the group when I was at Princeton but it became more important to me when I moved here, CUPA HR, which is College and University Personnel Association. They do marvelous conferences, they are a great network of professionals, and so

I would take classes with them sometimes and I would also just reach out to other colleagues at other universities.

Linda Arntzenius: So this CUPA HR, is that distinct from the Princeton Personnel Association?

Roberta Gernhardt: Mm-hmm.

Linda Arntzenius: So there were two professional bodies that you were a member of, is that right?

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes, yes, mm-hmm.

Linda Arntzenius: Can you tell me a little bit about each of those?

Roberta Gernhardt: Sure. The Princeton Personnel Association was literally just local and I think it started as Princeton and it expanded a bit into sort of South Brunswick and Lawrence and its membership went up and down. At one point I was the vice president of the organization and we would meet monthly over lunch, we'd have speakers often, but once again it was a group of individuals, professionals, HR professionals I could reach out to. So for instance what is the Seminary thinking about for the salary pool this year? What is the University looking at? You know. Or when the economy tanked, well what are you doing? What innovative things are you doing? So that was, Princeton Personnel. And CUPA HR again just – it's actually now an international organization, but great resources. They have an office in Washington, they were into lobbying for college and university causes and they were a wonderful source of help when it's needed.

Linda Arntzenius: Mm-hmm, and closer to home when there were – when it was February [Laughter] was there anyone other than Jim Barbour that you could blow off steam with?

Roberta Gernhardt: I was very close with our Comptroller, Mary Mazza. I still am friendly with her, I think in part because we encountered some of the same administrative issues. We were sort of part of Allen Rowe's, uh, top management group. you know, she and I would just privately over lunch sometimes just sort of let our hair down. But no, I mean it's, I have to say though at these conferences that CUPA would run, breakfast was always very entertaining because I would come away thinking, "Okay, the Institute really isn't so bad," in terms of you know crazy stories. I'd hear stories like I wouldn't believe from some of the other university people. No one would name names but they would just say what's going on and it would make me go back to the Institute refreshed. [Laughter]

Linda Arntzenius: Okay. Well, perhaps you might then tell me a little bit about how your responsibilities developed over the years, as the Institute is changing over four directors?

Roberta Gernhardt: Well I think – and when I think about directors I think there's – let me just think about it. There was Harry [Woolf],³ Murph [Goldberger],⁴ um...

Linda Arntzenius: Phillip [Griffiths].⁵

Roberta Gernhardt: Phillip, thank you. Peter [Goddard],⁶ and then briefly I was – I did work for–

Linda Arntzenius: Oh, so I stand corrected. Five. Excellent.

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes, no I did work for Robbert [Dijkgraaf]⁷ for a few months. We only crossed paths for a few months. I would say the responsibilities – well, the types of responsibilities did not really change. They perhaps just became larger, as the staff was growing a bit, especially in areas that made sense, development, communications and computing. I think one of the most important things, it always was, it was trying to find balance with what aspect of work was most critical. Employment typically was one of the most critical because if you couldn't find staff the work wasn't getting done.

So at times when there was – when there might be quite a few job openings it could be very stressful because you're still trying to negotiate the contract with the insurance company and, uh, you've got so-and-so retiring and you've got to help them and you've got to plan the party and so it's sort of juggling, which I think is part of any administrative job. I think as time went on and the world was changing, insurance companies would no longer negotiate with individuals, we had to have a broker for that, which made it somewhat easier but we would lose a little control. But it did make the whole renewal process a lot easier. I wasn't in the trenches so much. So things evolved. But I would say it also, and I know this is true for everybody today, electronic communication changed everything in that it didn't make life easier. It just made life more challenging in a lot of ways.

Linda Arntzenius: So it wasn't – I mean one tends to think, “Well you know every faculty member had a secretary who did all the heavy lifting, so to speak, when it came to communications, but then computers came in and made it easier for everyone and...” So you're saying that's not exactly how it went.

³ Harry Woolf (1923-2003), IAS Director, 1976-1987; Professor-At-Large, 1987-1994; Emeritus Professor, 1994-2003.

⁴ Marvin L. Goldberger (1922-2014), Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1966-1970, 1976-1977; IAS Director, 1987-1991.

⁵ Phillip Griffiths (1938-), Member in the School of Mathematics, 1968-1970; Visitor, 1981-1982; IAS Director, 1991-2003; Professor, 2004-2009; Emeritus Professor, 2009- .

⁶ Peter Goddard (1945-), Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1972-1974; Member in the School of Mathematics, 1988; IAS Director, 2004-2012; Professor in the School of Natural Sciences, 2012-2016; Emeritus Professor, 2016- .

⁷ Robbert Dijkgraaf (1960-), Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1991-1992; Visitor, 2002; IAS Director and Leon Levy Professor, 2012- .

Roberta Gernhardt: I think it is that, especially in administrative roles, not on the part of everyone but on the part of some, there's an expectation "Well you should answer this email within the next 10 minutes." And that extended to evenings and weekends and holidays and... So that, I think – again I don't think it's just administrative staff but it became much more of a 24/7 job. Not that I didn't turn off my computer at night, I did, but especially during winter season, with snow approaching, maybe I would get a little grumpy too because it was typically Allen and Jim and I that would be up early in the morning checking the University, checking the school districts, talking with one another, what were we going to do that day, and then I would put the messages out.

Linda Arntzenius: This is weather-related, yes.

Roberta Gernhardt: Weather-related. And we had, I would say, the last few years right before I left, we had some doozies of winters. And that's a stressful period for everyone and you can't always please everyone. If we opened at 10 a.m., "Well why didn't you open at 11 a.m.? Don't you know that I live 60 miles away?" Well, but that's your choice, you know –

Linda Arntzenius: And you have a resident campus here, you have people who have to be fed; you have a dining hall that they're relying on.

Roberta Gernhardt: Absolutely. Absolutely. And we moved over a period of time under Allen's direction for the most part – especially during the early years, we did not close *period* no matter what the weather was – to becoming a little bit more relaxed about it and I think that was a move in the right direction too. But certain staff, our groundskeepers, our dining hall, unless there was a state of emergency called by the governor, which happened a few times, and everybody had to stay off the road, but they knew that they would have to get in. And once again, they did. You know it just – no questions asked.

Linda Arntzenius: Tell me about some of the challenges in terms of, legal requirements, for example, changes that resulted from smoking bans and, sexual harassment policies that had to be created, which presumably didn't exist before you came here. So tell me about those.

Roberta Gernhardt: So with a lot of it, I would say, we evolved. I was always aware of what was going on in the broader world and knew that certain things would have to come here.

Linda Arntzenius: Were coming along the pipeline, so to speak.

Roberta Gernhardt: Right, right, and it's fascinating when I think back you know thirty years of how aghast various people were that we were going to limit areas on campus where you could smoke and [compare that] to where it is today. It's smoke-free and that's just accepted. But as with everything time changes people's attitudes and acceptance of things. So yes, we just had to stay on top of it. It was – it was interesting though. I think more than the sexual harassment or general harassment issues and I'll say a little bit

more about that in terms of a multi-national community and how that was a bit of a challenge here.

It was the area of benefits that became absolutely, ridiculous in terms of state laws being passed that contradicted federal laws and then federal laws would – and then trying to come up with policies. The prime example is federal, the Family Medical Leave Act.

New Jersey was ahead of the times and back in the '70s, I believe, instituted a temporary disability law. We were one of two or three states to do that. Not many states followed so then the federal government passed some laws that were not exactly the same and it was cherry-picking what must we do, what should we do, and trying to meld law into something that makes sense when you're trying to communicate it to people.

So that was a really big challenge, uh, but again I would turn to the Princeton Personnel Association colleagues, we were all facing it, uh, CUPA colleagues, and many times CUPA would come out with statements.

Linda Arntzenius: Kind of like boiler plate kind of or –

Roberta Gernhardt: CUPA on the FMLA less so because they're a national organization; Princeton Personnel was much better at that because they had state disability requirements plus now the federal laws.

Linda Arntzenius: But presumably *you* were not required *on your own* to sit down and draft, policy for the Institute regarding smoking, regarding –

Roberta Gernhardt: Oh yes, I was.

Linda Arntzenius: Okay, so tell me a little bit more, yes.

Roberta Gernhardt: So we also worked with a wonderful group of attorneys over the years out of Stevens and Lee. They had benefits attorneys and two local employment attorneys, Ann Reichelderfer and Brad – I can't think of Brad's last name.⁸

Roberta Gernhardt: Ann actually had done work with Princeton University too as outside counsel on employment matters and that's how we first knew her; Jim knew her from Princeton and I met her there, so they would also help us. They would send us bulletins: *you know you have to be thinking about this*. But yes, I did do a lot of the writing and, just had to do it.

Linda Arntzenius: Good for you. The smoking [ban] I guess you implemented that sort of piecemeal, I mean rather than *carte blanche*, because, I mean, I'm thinking of all the photographs of, you know –

Roberta Gernhardt: People smoking. *[Laughter]*

⁸ In reviewing this transcript, Ms. Gernhardt recalled that this was Bradley L. Mitchell.

- Linda Arntzenius:* Oppenheimer⁹ was never seen without a cigarette. Of course that was 20 years before your time but even so...
- Roberta Gernhardt:* Absolutely, but the law also evolved in the state. So certain areas were restricted and then, in the beginning we had to make accommodations for smokers and that was a big challenge because well maybe this room would be the smoking room. Well then right outside somebody is being bothered. There was a faculty member, and I'll name him because he was just so good-hearted about it. Michael Walzer¹⁰ loved his cigars and he had to give them up at some point.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Presumably he'd smoke in his own office.
- Roberta Gernhardt:* He could but it often just – especially a cigar. So he [Michael Walzer] you know – he was very cognizant and we didn't have a problem because it was Michael Walzer and he's that kind of individual.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. What about the dining hall? That must have been a big [change].
- Roberta Gernhardt:* Yes and no. I think by the time we really began to enforce pretty much a no smoking on campus the rest of the world or at least the rest of the east coast was adopting that too so it became easier and easier for that policy to expand because people understood it.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes, okay. And what about changes in, requirements regarding, harassment and relationships between – I mean the law is coming in and stipulating all sorts of things.
- Roberta Gernhardt:* Well here's again where I go back to the staff and I say they're one of a kind. Because we do have so many other cultures here. There were times – we didn't – I'm very fortunate to say we didn't have any serious harassment issues here. Often it was a misunderstanding and it could've been a cultural misunderstanding and there were times that in particular in the library a Member, a male Member, might be standing very close to the female staff member, and the female staff member would come and talk to me, and – so you know - we had protocol: "Do you feel comfortable talking with this Member? Do you want me..." so there were processes we had put in place but most times they understood, the staff member understood, that it was a cultural difference, it wasn't that they were truly being harassed.
- And that's where I think this is a unique environment that for the most part staff understood that and we didn't have as many issues. We had a few. We dealt with them. But I think we were fortunate. We had to do training programs and that did not – was not welcomed, which I understand but everybody, all institutions have to do training programs today or

⁹ J. Robert Oppenheimer (1904-1967), IAS Director, 1947-1966; Professor in the School of Natural Sciences, 1966-1967.

¹⁰ Michael Walzer (1935-), Professor in the School of Social Science, 1980-2007; Emeritus Professor, 2007- .

essentially you're already – the institution is already - found negligent in a court if you do not do training programs.

Linda Arntzenius: So these were training programs not just for staff but for faculty – across the board, the entire community.

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes, everybody, the entire community. You know as time has gone on it's – the legality on the benefits side but it's also extended into employment and it's very complex and there are many rules you have to follow, even in a small place like this. So we were obligated to have a training program and we communicated that and I think – and not that we didn't take any issue or allegation of harassment seriously, we absolutely did, but I think not all were convinced we truly needed training programs to teach people what was –

Linda Arntzenius: Did you experience any serious incidents of that kind in your experience?

Roberta Gernhardt: A few, a few, but not that many.

Linda Arntzenius: And what was the outcome? How were they dealt with?

Roberta Gernhardt: The outcome was that one emeritus professor had, uh, privileges removed for a period of time. Uh, the outcome was that one visiting faculty member was, asked to leave.

Linda Arntzenius: So there were serious repercussions.

Roberta Gernhardt: We did, we did, um –

Linda Arntzenius: And did those satisfy the individual who was harassed?

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes, yes, yes. So, we had a few cases but again we're talking 27 or more years, not a lot.

Linda Arntzenius: Mm-hmm. Tell me about, you talked a little bit about hiring individuals and trying to make sure they were a good fit. What happened in instances where you did bring in someone and, you mentioned in computing, it wasn't a good fit and they were asked to leave? But it's my perception, and it may be right or wrong, but that the staff at the Institute doesn't turn over a great deal. It may expand but there's not a lot of people coming and going, coming and going.

Roberta Gernhardt: That's true.

Linda Arntzenius: I may be wrong in that but...

Roberta Gernhardt: No, you're absolutely right.

Linda Arntzenius: So what happens if someone comes in and they are not a right fit for that particular niche? How do you handle that?

Roberta Gernhardt: On occasion, and I can think of a couple of cases where transfer opportunities opened up and maybe it didn't work in department X but in department Y it was perfect. So there was some of that and I think we tried – if we felt the individual had the potential to be a good fit and a good employee - we might look for those opportunities and try to make them happen. But if the individual after a lot of coaching by me and others, either peers or Allen, John Masten, and this didn't happen often, but we would come to an agreed upon ending of the employment relationship. Somebody once said to me, "It must be very difficult to fire people," and it's not pleasant but I always believed it was the right decision for both parties and that typically if a person is not being successful in their employment wherever they are they're miserable. It's not a good situation for them; it's not a good situation for anyone. So depending upon lots of factors in a situation we might help them find another job by hiring an outplacement agency to help somebody – you know, in certain cases. It didn't happen all the time but, I don't think as an employer – no one was surprised when they – if and when they got a call to come to my office because it had been building. You know there were a lot of steps we went through, a lot of documentation, and it wasn't just documentation for the file; whatever went into a file was what the person themselves received. So there were no surprises.

Linda Arntzenius: This leads me, and we're going off your career a little bit but I have to ask you this, this leads me to the instance of recent firings at the Institute, which I'm not going to ask you to go into details about because you're not a staff member, but the feeling that I had my ear to the ground and picked up on was that *things like that don't happen at the Institute*. What's your kind of gut reaction to that?

Roberta Gernhardt: The only thing I can say is being in HR, having been in HR, not everyone knows the whole story all the time because there were a lot of things I'm sure that I was criticized for doing over time that maybe people did not know the whole story. And I think I'd like to leave it at that. I don't know what really went on and I don't really want to know what went on.

Linda Arntzenius: Okay. That's fair enough.

Roberta Gernhardt: It's tough.

Linda Arntzenius: That's fair enough, but one of the things that I will press you on is the instance of, taking away, uh, an employee's access to their computer, after – *immediately* after they had been fired, is that standard practice?

Roberta Gernhardt: Pretty much, it is.

Linda Arntzenius: Can you explain why?

Roberta Gernhardt: You hope that, when you have that difficult conversation with someone, you hope a few things. You expect that they should not be surprised. If they are surprised that makes it even more challenging, but there shouldn't be surprise. It shouldn't be a long, drawn out conversation.

Typically you hand the individual a packet of information, you go over that packet of information, and there's a severance package typically and – but how much that individual's hearing at that last meeting is probably – but you never know how someone's going to react. And when you say "their computer," it isn't *their* computer; it's the Institute's. And one of my jobs and anyone in that HR role for an institution, you are protecting the institution and I think it is fairly standard. I think everyone tries to do it with as much care as possible but it *is* a challenge. So, now typically we would let, in most cases, not in all cases, but in most cases, we would let people have access and we would send them files later but would we turn off access to the computer? Yes, we did.

Linda Arntzenius: Mm-hmm, so you – I guess fearing some act of sabotage perhaps.

Roberta Gernhardt: You never know. You never know. Either sabotage or just an email message to either the local community or Friends of the Institute or whoever.

Linda Arntzenius: Right, right. So it's done to protect the organization.

Roberta Gernhardt: It is; it is.

Linda Arntzenius: Thank you for that. So, we've talked about professional changes, changes in the law, new law seminars, the Family Leave Act, and that you'd been Manager of Benefits at the University and found, presumably, that TIAA-CREF was very helpful in all of those personal retirement issues.

Roberta Gernhardt: Absolutely.

Linda Arntzenius: Could you say something about handling work and home life because presumably you didn't stay part-time for very long.

Roberta Gernhardt: Right, right.

Linda Arntzenius: Did the Institute make that an easy...

Roberta Gernhardt: I wouldn't say the Institute as much as sort of who you're working for. I think the Institute in general was very open and, again a community. Allen, I had a lot of respect for him but he's a former Marine and, you know, I think duty first was always the sense [he had] and I don't say all men are like that but Allen was. But I knew that coming in so I tried as best as I could to have a balance, and that's where, electronic communication actually was very helpful because I could be home with my young daughter and – you know after my standard hours and still be in communication. I'm there with her and I'm present but I could be in communication with people by email. Email was not a phenomenon known to the rest of the world at that moment but because we were I think an NSF contractor we all had email. And my account here was RG [rg@ias.edu]; that shows you how few people had emails at the time.

- Linda Arntzenius:* Oh my goodness, so we're talking even before Phillip Griffiths' tenure. We're talking, uh, let's see, under Murph Goldberger.
- Roberta Gernhardt:* Yes, probably. Yes, it was early. Yes, we were one of the early [users of electronic mail]...
- Linda Arntzenius:* I have to ask you this also before we move on, because I know Joan Scott¹¹ spoke about this at your retirement party and she mentioned the committee that was formed to handle sexual harassment issues. And if you could just describe that committee a little bit and what Joan was so impressed by.
- Roberta Gernhardt:* So we had faculty representation on it, and Joan was a member. We made sure that we had a variety of ages, of sexes, of sexual orientations, and we would meet, probably not regularly enough, but when a case of harassment came, as much as we needed to, we would share it with other members of the committee, before taking action. Joan was aware of the one, that's the one she spoke about at my retirement, where we had to remove secretarial privileges from an emeritus professor because I wasn't sure that – you know you always try to keep an open mind but the individual who was alleging the harassment, there were also some performance issues going on with her at the time – so I wasn't sure you know is this her perception because she's feeling threatened or – and when the faculty member admitted that he had taken these actions I sort of lost it – *[Laughter]* unfortunately or fortunately, but then that's when I had to go report back to the director at the time who I think was Phillip and then Phillip took it from there to remove the privileges for a period of time.
- Linda Arntzenius:* And we're talking significant privileges because even though someone is emeritus here they still retain their office, secretarial support, computing, what have you.
- Roberta Gernhardt:* Yes, so when we say privileges, all privileges were not revoked; the secretarial privileges were for six months I believe. And during that time, some of the staffing was, sort of circulated or circled around in that department so that when secretarial privileges were reinstated it was a different secretary and there was a warning that should it ever happen again that all privileges would be revoked.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Okay, all right, so now if you don't mind tell me a little bit more about Crossroads because I know that when you started Crossroads was in Quonset huts.
- Roberta Gernhardt:* Yes, they were. They loved their Quonset Huts too. They did a lot to – again, when I come on campus and I think of the transformation say in the last thirty years, it is mind-boggling. So housing was very different at that time, and literally in the middle of the complex were, I think, three Quonset huts. I think two were Crossroads and I think one was – I think

¹¹ Joan Wallach Scott (1941-), Member in the School of Social Science, 1978-1979; Professor, 1985-2014; Emeritus Professor, 2014- .

Charlotte Langlands had a kiln, and so she would give art classes there too.

Linda Arntzenius: So it was the Arts and Crafts Center then.

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes, I think that's what it was.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes. These are Quonset huts we should explain.

Roberta Gernhardt: These are Quonset huts from World War II just like the University's, you know, their Butler Tract. Which I hope they've renovated by this time. So they were drafty and they were – there was no true foundation and, but it didn't bother the kids, didn't bother the teachers, and at that time it was I believe a three- to five-year old program, might have been two and a half, but essentially three to five, three classrooms, uh, part-time, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. daily during the academic year with *lots* of holiday time built in too. And –

Linda Arntzenius: And it was for faculty and for Members.

Roberta Gernhardt: That's right, at that time. And, you know, the workforce was changing, the Member population was changing...

Linda Arntzenius: Staff? Was it for staff as well?

Roberta Gernhardt: I think staff could because I do believe Momota [Ganguli] had her daughter there. I think. So I think staff could use it. But for most staff it did not not work because it was 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. with lots of holidays. So we began to talk with – and when I say *we* it was Allen, myself, because it was bubbling up mainly from the Member community. A lot of the staff had made their own arrangements; I was one of those. I had a full-time babysitter. There were other nursery schools open in the area, so it wasn't as much of a staff need as it was a Member need because some female Members were coming alone with children, sometimes there were two – you know a dual Member couple. Often, and I think it continues today, Members specifically have children the year that they're here for a lot of reasons.

Citizenship... It's a break in their career, it's a time that they can sort of handle it, so all of a sudden it seemed over a period of just a few years there was a real need. So we started talking with Crossroads and there was a lot of reluctance to change what was a wonderful program that worked for them.

Linda Arntzenius: And this [reluctance] is coming from whom, from the teachers?

Roberta Gernhardt: Some of the teachers, the head of Crossroads, and you have to remember who started Crossroads; it was Math faculty wives: Charlotte Langlands, Lily Harish-Chandra; those are two of the names that come right [to mind] – but it wasn't just them. It was more. So at the same time over a period of – I don't remember how long it was - but we knew we had

to do something because it was becoming pressing for the Members. And because of the way that the Member invitation year worked it was next to impossible for them to find out about other area schools, get their children enrolled. It was just impossible.

Linda Arntzenius: So the Members are looking for more coverage. They're looking for all-day coverage?

Roberta Gernhardt: They were looking for a variety of things, some all-day, some part-day. They wanted everything, some babies, infants, we never had infants. So we started, as an experiment, an infant center and those are the nights I didn't sleep. We had them in several apartments, we had a few teachers that we hired, it was not formally part of Crossroads but there were –

Linda Arntzenius: Are these the “nanny centers?”

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes, this is the nanny center.

Linda Arntzenius: Okay yes, explain that.

Roberta Gernhardt: So we would have – I can't remember the specifics I should - I think I blotted it out of my head, maybe three to four babies per apartment but I think we only had two apartments, it's not like we had twenty, and anywhere between three to say seven babies at any one time ranging from three months to a year and a half, two years. And we were very flexible whether it was a part-time or a full-time program. Again it was Members, we did have a few staff involved, that was the beginning of full-time for staff, their children, and we continued discussions with the Crossroads group showing 1: there was a need and 2: we have to have it and we want you to be part of this. So it took a lot of negotiating and a lot of time but we finally got them on board.

Linda Arntzenius: And you were negotiating with the staff or the teachers?

Roberta Gernhardt: The teachers and the board of trustees of Crossroads. It was mainly Math faculty wives.

Linda Arntzenius: Ah yes, I understand.

Roberta Gernhardt: So eventually they agreed, and were very involved in designing, re-designing, the ECP [Electronic Computer Project] building and when it first opened, and it still is a glorious space for kids, but it was amazing. And it became a very flexible program with part-time and full-time opportunities, nine-month and twelve-month opportunities for care, much more complex to run today than what Crossroads was or the nanny center was, but it really – it fits the needs for the Institute.

Linda Arntzenius: So it has a, would you say, a much more *professional* staff today?

Roberta Gernhardt: No, I would say the staff of Crossroads was always professional. They had magnificent teachers and that's why the Institute wanted to continue

the program with them because they were amazing individuals, mainly women, I mean I think at one point all women, talented, devoted, you name it. so you know it took a few years but it's also a generational thing where they loved their school and they didn't want it to become "daycare." There was a nursery school versus daycare mentality at that time. And not just here but everywhere, [the concern] that children were being "warehoused" in daycare while their parents went off to work. And they [Crossroads] did not want to be part of that. And they never were. But I think there was a great fear on their part that we would force them to become that. So I think it's worked out beautifully but it took a number of years for everybody to sort of go, "Ah, [sighs] okay, it works."

Linda Arntzenius: Now, I have on my notes here to ask you about the move of the comptroller's office?

Roberta Gernhardt: Well it all happened at the same time. They were located in the basement where administrative services is, or was.

Linda Arntzenius: The basement of the ECP building?

Roberta Gernhardt: No, they were in the basement of, uh, B-Building, you know where Mike Ciccone [Manager of Administrative Services] is and that group. HR was down there at one time too. But they were expanding. Their staff was growing. Again with all of the regulations going on with the government and banking, it affected them [the comptroller's office] as well. So during the renovation, the ECP building was split into three pieces. The largest was of course the childcare center. The comptroller's office was the next largest piece, and then a small fitness center, which was also something that was needed and finally became part of life here.

Linda Arntzenius: Mm-hmm. Tell me was there ever a request, to put in a pool at any point? Is that something that rings a bell?

Roberta Gernhardt: Not that I'm aware of, not that maybe it didn't happen, but I don't remember hearing that.

Linda Arntzenius: Okay, because the fitness center is very small.

Roberta Gernhardt: It is and I would say at the beginning it was the right size. It wasn't used that much. I would go on occasion early in the morning before work; nobody else was there. People would go after work, and of course Members and spouses had the opportunity during the day but I think it quickly became too small.

Linda Arntzenius: When you first arrived, Harry Woolf was into his second term as director. What was the atmosphere of the Institute at that time?

Roberta Gernhardt: It didn't feel so much like a community. I think there was a lot of, um – which I did not fully recognize until I arrived - but a lot of distrust of administration on the part of faculty. I don't know – I don't remember

where Harry was in terms of the end of his tenure when I first arrived. He left in what year?

Linda Arntzenius: '87.

Roberta Gernhardt: Okay, so I cannot remember whether he knew he was leaving in '87 or not, but it was a bit of a tumultuous time.

Linda Arntzenius: It's no secret that he was unpopular with quite a number of faculty.

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes.

Linda Arntzenius: Nor is it a secret that he and his wife Pat Woolf divorced –

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes.

Linda Arntzenius: And later on in his life I think he was very sick too. I don't know if he was sick when you came.

Roberta Gernhardt: No, he was not. He was still very vibrant and funny and you know he could be very charming. But there was this undercurrent of tension that you could just feel, between him and sort of – as part of the administration we worked for Harry so I think that that carried over into some of our initial relationships but at least mine - with faculty. That just because I was part of the administration I was part of that camp. And I think things did change significantly a bit with Murph [Goldberger] but there was still – that did not work out, and for unknown reasons to me. I thought Murph was a breath of fresh air.

Linda Arntzenius: How about [Murph's wife] Mildred?

Roberta Gernhardt: Mildred – Mildred was interesting. They were devoted to one another. They were a lovely couple, but she was not always an easy person; she had some strong ideas about things. But you know you get used to sort of rolling with things. You just have to...

Linda Arntzenius: Mary Wisnovsky was on the staff at this time is that right?

Roberta Gernhardt: Who?

Linda Arntzenius: Mary Wisnovsky.

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes, she was.

Linda Arntzenius: What was her role? Do you remember?

Roberta Gernhardt: Mary was here before I was. I think at one point she was brought on before I arrived to do something with one of the large celebratory years, anniversaries of the Institute. I think that was her initial role and then she stayed on sort of in a quasi-development role. Um...

Linda Arntzenius: Oh, did she help found The Friends?

Roberta Gernhardt: She might have.

Linda Arntzenius: Okay, I'm not sure. We're kind of speculating and getting off track here a little bit.

Roberta Gernhardt: She might have, I'm not sure but, yes, Mary was here, and she was close with Harry, you know, and I don't know whether she became close once she was here or they knew each other before. That I don't know, but yes, she was here for a few years while I was here.

Linda Arntzenius: Well, as I say, you worked under five directors, so perhaps we might take each administration in just simple chronological order. You've spoken a little bit about Harry Woolf and then Murph Goldberger. Did you feel a sense that Murph Goldberger had come in to try and pour oil on troubled waters, so to speak?

Roberta Gernhardt: I'm – I'm not sure. I think Murph came in as a transition and I think he sort of knew he was a transition. But I think it caught everyone by surprise – not everyone, but some of us - how short a transition it was going to be. Because I think it was difficult then to get much accomplished. I think under Harry we were somewhat in a holding pattern in some ways and I think it sort of continued with Murph. Not a lot – that I can remember - not a lot changed.

Linda Arntzenius: So a lot changed when Phillip Griffiths [became director]–

Roberta Gernhardt: Big time, yes.

Linda Arntzenius: So tell me about that. Tell me about the particular challenges for the Institute at that time.

Roberta Gernhardt: Well there were a lot and I think, we were still then very – before Phillip – very much a quiet, self-involved, removed, elite academic institution and we didn't want the outside world to know who we were. We did not want outsiders here. We did not – you know, it was supposed to be quiet, contemplative, all of those great things. And Phillip, I think, was masterful at seeing – knowing - what the world really was, knowing what we needed, and gradually getting us there. He developed a very good relationship with the faculty and that had been something that was missing for as long as I had been at the Institute and for many years before. So I don't know whether it was new to the Institute, but he did have Executive Officers' meetings on a regular basis.

He had committees that he formed, ad hoc committees with faculty to study different things, to be involved in different things. Under Phillip, that's when the development organization changed and grew. I think there was a lot of hesitation on the part of some faculty to see development grow and communications grow but over time it became very accepted. Phillip is a very shy person and I think can be uncomfortable in a crowd.

He is masterful at meetings. He really is, pulling people into consensus, staying on top of the topic. So I learned from Phillip, just watching him.

Linda Arntzenius: I think it was in the mid-'90s that Hamish Maxwell [IAS Trustee] drew the attention of the board to the importance of attracting funds to the endowment. Is that something you were aware of?

Roberta Gernhardt: No, I was not involved with the board of trustees except hearing peripherally from Allen what might have been discussed.

Linda Arntzenius: Mm-hmm. Now the director's office expanded considerably under Phillip. Did Allen Rowe bring in more people? He brought Jim Barbour and he brought you in; who else did he bring in?

Roberta Gernhardt: Well of course, but we were there before Phillip and so was Jim [Barbour]. I filled someone's role, Barbara Roudabush; Jim filled someone's role, Carl Pope I think. Where the director's office really expanded was more development and communications.

Linda Arntzenius: Okay, so is this when Rachel Gray [Associate Director for Development and Public Affairs, now retired] came in?

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes, under Phillip.

Linda Arntzenius: And Arlen [Hastings, former Assistant to the Director]?

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes.

Linda Arntzenius: Pamela [Hughes, Senior Development Officer]?

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes.

Linda Arntzenius: Michel Reymond, the chef, I think he must have come in earlier.

Roberta Gernhardt: No, later.

Linda Arntzenius: Oh later, okay.

Roberta Gernhardt: No, Michel – Michel came in under Phillip but a number of years later. We had a couple of other chefs after Franz [Moehn].

Linda Arntzenius: Yes, so there is considerable expansion and, uh, I also think there was considerable expansion in terms of the formation of The Friends.

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes.

Linda Arntzenius: And the formation of AMIAS as well. Um...

Roberta Gernhardt: I think, I may be wrong, but I believe AMIAS was in existence for a very long time but at some point it transitioned over to being more of an

institutional organization rather than an *alumni* organization run by the alumni.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes, I'm hoping to track down some of the founders of AMIAS and interview them. So if you could tell me about some of the developments that took place from the beginning of Phillip's tenure and I'm thinking about things like the expansion of the campus, the buildings, the sale of the Institute Woods, plans for faculty housing, of course we have Wolfensohn Hall and Simonyi Hall and Bloomberg Hall, but we also have the expansion in academic areas, theoretical computer science, East Asian history, astrophysics, theoretical biology, all of these were sort of seeded I think during – no?

Roberta Gernhardt: No. Astrophysics was in existence before Phillip.

Linda Arntzenius: Ah, okay.

Roberta Gernhardt: I'm sorry; name some of the other ones.

Linda Arntzenius: Theoretical biology?

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes, that was Phillip.

Linda Arntzenius: Computer science, theoretical computer science?

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes, Phillip.

Linda Arntzenius: So did it feel like you – were people energized?

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes, and I think a little frightened. And by that I mean you know if you really look at – except for a few key areas, which we've already talked about, computing, fundraising and, communications, less communications than development but that too – the rest of the staff remained essentially flat.

When I was hired in '85 it was me and one other person and it still was that when I left, except that visas came under me and then visas became another person – but that's a whole other thing.

So I think everyone was energized. But, where it was definitely for most of our staff members an 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. job, it became overtime, overtime, overtime. And in the first few years some of the staff – especially the maintenance staff were excited to be making all of the overtime.

And then everybody's getting a little older and it's getting harder, and it was difficult at times to meet the true need. Having concerts, who's going to staff them? Who's going to clean up after? Who's going to do set-up? We're having dinners; who's going to do all that, with essentially the staff remaining flat? And I know that was something Allen was very proud of but I think over time it took its toll with some people too. We didn't have enough depth and we were beginning to change that. probably in '05, '06

we started to talk about increasing staff and then the economy tanked in '08 and we couldn't do anything. So I do believe that staff has expanded a little bit in the last few years across other areas. I just saw that there was another housing job open, which I think they needed, so I'm hoping they've learned their lesson.

Linda Arntzenius: Some of the issues that came up during that period, and I don't know how much you were aware or involved with, say, the Piet Hut¹² situation, how did that impact you and staff people, because that was – you know, it was out there?

Roberta Gernhardt: Well, it was out there, and because it was out there and sometimes in *The New York Times* out there, staff would talk about it and just be distressed that the Institute was not being seen in a favorable light. I think sometimes there was distress that it was being handled the way it was being handled too, and, you know, once again no one knows what really went on. I know some but not all, but it – I think the Institute took a position that was next to impossible to follow through on trying to get rid of Piet and it turned out to be true.

Linda Arntzenius: Mm-hmm, so were – in general, were staff people happy with the resolution, the way it was resolved, or do you think there's still a – well it's a long time ago now.

Roberta Gernhardt: It's a long time ago. I think most people now don't think about it. I think for a year or two afterwards it was, "Oh my goodness, look at all the resources going to Piet Hut," you know. Because budgets are always tight, salary increases are always lean, and you know, for people who did see some of the financial pieces to that, it was a little distressing.

Linda Arntzenius: When you first came, how did you respond to – or what was your impression of the set-up of the Institute, the four schools and how they worked together or did not work together?

Roberta Gernhardt: I don't think I really formed an opinion; it was just the way it was. I always – it was so funny today, just a little anecdote, one of the things we used to say when a new group of Members would come in every year is we could usually take a pretty good guess at what School they were affiliated with by how they dressed.

So as I was walking into this math building today a gentleman was wearing Birkenstocks and socks and I went, "I knew it, a mathematician. That was always a mathematician." So I thought, "Oh, some things haven't changed." But you know – and we didn't do it in a mean way, it was just – it was sort of our staff – a little staff inside joke at the beginning of each year. It was interesting to me, it would sort of – that the Schools did not always cooperate with one another was a helpful insight to me because especially at the beginning when again I felt part of the Harry Woolf regime and therefore not all that accepted I realized that they

¹² Piet Hut (1952-), Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1981-1984;), Professor in the School of Natural Sciences, 1985-2002; Professor in the Program in Interdisciplinary Studies, 2002- .

weren't accepting each other – their own colleagues across Schools at times. So it gave me – it allowed me to depersonalize it a little bit and to recognize that it's institutional and we'll just have to work with that.

Linda Arntzenius: So each School was sort of looking out for itself rather than thinking of the Institute.

Roberta Gernhardt: I would say for the most part but not always and there were some individuals, Freeman Dyson¹³ is an example, just you know [*throwing wide her arms*] across all schools, across administration, just you know –

Linda Arntzenius: Embracing.

Roberta Gernhardt: Embracing. But there was still, I felt, a lot of tension between some individuals in The School of Historical Studies and everybody in Social Sciences, and it – you know it was a shame because –

Linda Arntzenius: And these are hangovers from the founding of the School of Social Science?

Roberta Gernhardt: From years before, from the School of Social Science, right, and Carl Kaysen.¹⁴

Linda Arntzenius: How did it manifest itself?

Roberta Gernhardt: A great example I think is space, not that I was involved so much – I wasn't involved at all in space allocation, but I'd be privy to some space allocation discussions, and there was an unwillingness to give up their space if another School needed it without some – you know, and maybe that's normal, but it was – that's just one way I think it manifested itself. There wasn't a [sense of] "We're all at the Institute." Or the library. The Historical Studies and Social Science Library needs more space for the archives: *Well that's their problem; it's not the Math Library's problem*, as an example.

Linda Arntzenius: Right, right, yes. So, Phillip was here for quite a long time but ultimately he moved on and Peter Goddard came in in 2003. what changes in the administration came about as a result of this new director and, essentially the start of a new millennium as well we might say?

Roberta Gernhardt: In some ways you couldn't have two people be more different in terms of their management style. Phillip was aware and involved but also detached. Peter was involved in everything from beginning to end and I think it took all of us a little while to get used to that. Peter also had a vision, Peter was also very good with faculty conversations and negotiations just like Phillip had been, so I think it continued – I think Peter continued in large part what Phillip had started in terms of building

¹³ Freeman J. Dyson (1923-), Member in the Schools of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, 1948-1950; Professor in the School of Natural Sciences, 1953-1994; Emeritus Professor, 1994- .

¹⁴ Carl Kaysen (1920-2010), IAS Director, 1966-1976.

better relationships.

Peter also, I think, took a real view to, even more than Phillip did, to the importance of the history of the Institute, and I think that's where the archives and sort of beefing up some policies and probably the Oral History Project is another example. Peter, maybe because he was British, but he had definitely more of a long-term view I think than anybody else had and I think that was good for the institution.

Linda Arntzenius: Now, there's an expression: a new broom sweeps clean. Is that always your experience?

Roberta Gernhardt: No, no. I mean, there were some upper level staff changes when Peter came in. I think a lot of it came down to, style and, communication issues, a lot of communication issues. So Rachel and then subsequently Allen decided to retire.

Linda Arntzenius: Well, Jim Barbour retired first.

Roberta Gernhardt: Well, Jim – yes, I think – but not under pressure. Jim had had a heart attack maybe seven or eight years prior, he had also lost his brother, so he was now the only child in the family taking care of parents who lived with him and his wife, and I think he was the person who always had his eye on the prize of early retirement. So I think it was, he was ready to go. I also think, when I talk a little bit about the pace of the place changing – I think that that too was part of it because he [Jim] saw his staff stressed and there wasn't always a lot he could do; there was a lot of juggling going on. So I think he was ready [to retire].

Linda Arntzenius: Allen, on the other hand, seems to me he was not.

Roberta Gernhardt: I would have to say I think you're right, but if I remember the sequence correctly, I think Rachel decided to retire first, and then, I think, Allen did subsequently.

Linda Arntzenius: I think it was the other way around.

Roberta Gernhardt: Was it the other way around?

Linda Arntzenius: Yes, I've got Allen Rowe's successor John Masten was appointed in 2005. That was before Allen retired in December and I wondered if that was normal practice for someone to come in [before their predecessor leaves] –

Roberta Gernhardt: It can be.

Linda Arntzenius: And then, January, Rachel, I believe, retired.

Roberta Gernhardt: See, and I would have to say all of it happened rather quickly. And I do know that Jim and Allen worked very closely together and Allen relied on Jim. And I can remember him saying to Jim, "You weren't supposed to go

before me," sort of kidding but serious. And I think for Allen and then again in terms of what the resignation dates were, I still think Rachel might have been first.

Linda Arntzenius: Okay, may have been.

Roberta Gernhardt: And so then Jim left, Rachel was leaving, those were his two closest colleagues, and I think he thought, "Okay, I'm gonna go now too." I think if the team had stayed in place, if Jim had been there and then Rachel – you're right. I don't think Allen would have left. But I think because his team, the people he worked closest with [had gone]–

Linda Arntzenius: So how did that affect you? These were people you had worked with for many, many years.

Roberta Gernhardt: It was sort of head spinning.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes, and Georgia Whidden, I should say, also went during that time.

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes, she left. Well, Georgia hadn't been there all that long but she'd been there a while. I think what was head spinning so much is that where Phillip relied on, especially, Allen and Rachel, now you have Peter in there, and he's not relying on them, and so I sort of got dragged in, pulled in to more of a consulting phase with Peter than I had previously had.

Linda Arntzenius: I should also mention that Arlen, who had been Phillip's secretary for many, many years, I believe Peter had assumed she would continue in that role for him.

Roberta Gernhardt: And she did not want to – right, right, and that was a big vacancy because she really knew the ins and the outs and she had – and of course at that time Phillip and Arlen were already developing the off-site SIG [Science Initiative Group] and other programs, and I think Arlen saw a future for herself there, so I understood why she wanted to go.

Linda Arntzenius: So did you feel that Peter, this new director coming in, many staff changes, many demands on his time, also coming from a foreign country, I mean some distance away, coming from a different culture, did you find that he relied upon you *outwith* your HR role?

Roberta Gernhardt: Mm-hmm, yes, and that was okay, because I recognized, at least for a period of time, he did, and for that period of time there was nobody else, so it was fine. But it was a very stressful period in terms of my commitment to work. You know I would usually arrive at 7 a.m. in the morning. It was difficult for me to stay late in the evening, but I was usually at work every morning at 7 a.m. and again doing a lot of work when I was home. But it was fine. It lasted a year or so until John Masten got in place, and then Mike Gehret [Associate Director for Development and Public Affairs] too, so it was a temporary situation.

Linda Arntzenius: During the collapse of the economy, could you say something about that - because that was around 2008 – so again this is another thing that sort of lands on Peter's lap? Would you say something about that, because I understand the Institute didn't cut any positions.

Roberta Gernhardt: No, we didn't.

Linda Arntzenius: So how did you cope with that?

Roberta Gernhardt: Well, I actually spoke about this at my retirement, because again this is one of the lasting impressions I have of the institution. We didn't cut any. We were looking at what can we do to lower the draw on the endowment that's been hit. So we were talking about voluntary furloughs, you know, we were looking at all different kinds of things. And, rumors always start and there was a rumor at one point – we had meetings with staff during that time to let them know what our thinking was and I think we did institute this voluntary furlough and, uh, we went out to explain it so people would know and it would help the budget ultimately but you're not being forced to do it.

And, I had a couple of groundskeepers come to my office after that and say, "I'm old. If you have to lay somebody off, lay me off. I'm okay. Joe's got a young family; keep him on. Mike is paying medical bills; keep him on. If you need to lay somebody off lay me off." Yes, so my heart, you know, just talk about a sense of community!

Linda Arntzenius: Do you want to name any of those people?

Roberta Gernhardt: No, no, but I mean it was just – actually one is deceased now. He did finally retire but he died soon after. But just, you know, the willingness of everyone to sort of step up, recognize we we are all in it together. And you know their own retirement accounts took hits. It wasn't just my employment but, you know TIAA-CREF, it's a great organization except when you have all your funds in stock, so...

Linda Arntzenius: Yes. All right, well I want to come to some more sort of, general questions about the Institute. Whether you, over your years, you have seen anything that wasn't working well at the Institute, because of its structure or culture, and similarly anything that was sort of exemplary?

Roberta Gernhardt: Hmm. Well I have to go back to Crossroads as exemplary. It was not an easy period of trying to get us all on the same page. I read a great book at that time, *Getting to Yes*¹⁵. Have you ever read that book?

Linda Arntzenius: No.

Roberta Gernhardt: Good book, and it helped me because we really all did have the same goal in mind, an exceptional facility for children affiliated with the Institute.

¹⁵ *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* by Roger Fisher and William L. Ury (member of the Harvard Negotiation Project), 1981.

And if you just sort of stop the discussion there we agree. It's when you get into part-time, full-time, staff, summer, that's when the differences came up. So I would say Crossroads was and remains a shining star in terms of its reputation within the community, the leadership, there was a new director who was hired while I was still here. She is magnificent and, I think, has brought it into the 21st century¹⁶.

Linda Arntzenius: Excellent. Is there anything about the Institute? What is it that makes the Institute so distinctive? Or is it simply a belief, an internal belief that it is distinctive? I'm wondering if there's a tangible Institute ethos or philosophy?

Roberta Gernhardt: I think one of the things, as I understand it, you know, there are many [more] other places similar to the Institute today than there were thirty years ago. But if I understand a lot of those – and I don't know a lot about each and every one of them – I think one of the things that makes us very unique is the diversity of scholarship that goes on here. So that it is mathematicians, it's astrophysicists, theoretical biologists, historians, social science – you know it's everybody. And so it brings a lot of diversity into daily life here just because the interests are so varied. I think that's one of the things that makes us unique.

Linda Arntzenius: Mm-hmm. Were you able to give any advice to your successor?

Roberta Gernhardt: I left a lot of notes and I also left open the invitation to call with questions, which he did the first probably 18 months, not often, but on occasion. He actually called me maybe a year and a half ago so now I'm out like three and a half years and he asked me a question. I was on vacation during the time, but I said, "Michael, I have to think about that and get back to you. I honestly cannot remember." I did get back to him, so but yes I think – I think things seem to be going well.

Linda Arntzenius: And I have to ask you why you retired?

Roberta Gernhardt: So – it's – all personal reasons. In 2008 my husband died suddenly and in 2011 I was diagnosed with stage III breast cancer and I was only 58, 54 when my husband died, 57 actually when I was diagnosed with breast cancer, and stage III. I did not know any survivors. I do now but at that moment in my life I knew no stage III survivors and I thought, "I don't want to die sitting at my desk. I don't want to die regretting that I didn't spend whatever time I have left doing what I want to do." So I took an early retirement and knock on wood passed five years last February.

Linda Arntzenius: Congratulations.

Roberta Gernhardt: And feel good and, I miss the Institute. I miss so many of the people, but I love my Sunday evenings when I can go to bed and not worry about what storm is coming, what do I have to do, what's on my desk tomorrow.

¹⁶ Ms. Gernhardt is referring to Crossroads Director Danielle Otis.

Linda Arntzenius: So what is your involvement with the Institute now?

Roberta Gernhardt: I really don't have any very honestly. Again I'm happy to answer questions, happy to participate in something like this. I purposefully kept a very low profile for a year or two afterwards to let everyone else do their own thing, and it just has sort of continued that way. In fact today will only be the second time I'm having lunch in the dining hall since I left.

Linda Arntzenius: Amazing.

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes, yes.

Linda Arntzenius: Now tell me about Paddle for Pink.

Roberta Gernhardt: Paddle for Pink is wonderful. I was just in a dragon boat race on Saturday also at Mercer County Park; it's a different field though. It's a very competitive race. Ours benefits breast cancer survivors and their families in the local community, so in the greater Princeton community. We raise about \$40,000 every June.

Linda Arntzenius: Now when you say *we* are you talking about the Institute's team?

Roberta Gernhardt: My team, no my team, which is called Machestic Dragons. We are breast cancer survivors and supporters and we put on a race with about 45 teams. One of them has been the Institute Community Team, "Einstein's Crew," the last few years. They've taken first place several times.

They gave me a plaque one year honoring me, thanking me for it; they're a great group. That was the only other time I had lunch here because I met the team downstairs in August, and it's just a lot of fun. So we provide money to the Breast Cancer Resource center, to the local Y, to fund programs for women who maybe don't have insurance and can't get a mammogram, need a prosthetic or a wig and don't have the money, so that's a big part of what we do.

Linda Arntzenius: Okay. Well I'm getting towards the end of my questions. I have a few more to go. You'll make your lunch today. Which faculty stand out in your recollection and why?

Roberta Gernhardt: I would say always John Bahcall¹⁷ and I think most people would say that. John was a force of nature and, he could be very tough, very tough and very feared. But I also saw the relationship he had with his Members. He was a real mentor and that is something that I really think is something that I realize is so important with the Institute is that mentorship for young scholars. So he stands out. There are so many others too, who are just

¹⁷ John Norris Bahcall (1934-2005), Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1969-1970; Professor, 1971-2005.

very down to earth. Peter Sarnak¹⁸ is one, Tom Spencer¹⁹ is one, Joan Scott is another, and you know Joan Scott was the only woman when she was appointed. That could not have been easy. So I have a lot of respect for the faculty here.

Linda Arntzenius: And what in your opinion makes a good director?

Roberta Gernhardt: Flexibility, involvement, engagement, their own scholarship because I do believe that they need to be respected by their faculty peers. I think those qualities are among the qualities one would need.

Linda Arntzenius: And as HR director I'd like to ask you what was the most bizarre thing you had to deal with?

Roberta Gernhardt: Hmm, a case of harassment which involved in the end only Members. It was an individual who had, a one-sided love affair with one Member and so was planting evidence against another Member and as it all unfolded the players – it just – it was beyond [belief] –

Linda Arntzenius: Sounds like stalking.

Roberta Gernhardt: It was a bit and it was – yes, it was one of the more difficult ones but it also turned out in a way that I never expected it to unfold. So that remains for me one of the more, unusual, um – yes, one of the more unusual ones.

Linda Arntzenius: So when you're asked about the Institute how do you describe it to people who perhaps know little about it?

Roberta Gernhardt: I use the phrase “community of scholars” because I think that that's a great start and, explain that it is not part of Princeton University, which is also the first thing you have to disavow them of. And I just describe sort of the uniqueness of again the four schools, the number of disciplines here, the age, the number of scholars who come, hundreds every year when you count all the visitors, and how this cohesive staff sort of makes it all work.

Every once in a while I would hire somebody who then would be intimidated by the brilliance of everyone and I would say to them, “We're the common sense. It wouldn't work if we weren't here so relax.” A lot of times they're brilliant but they may not have a lot of common sense. That's not always true for all but you know just to make people feel more relaxed and part of the organization.

Linda Arntzenius: Well it's been here for quite some time now and it looks as if it's pretty healthy and will stick around for a while longer.

¹⁸ Peter Sarnak (1953-), Member in the School of Mathematics, 1999-2000; 2002; 2005-2007; Professor, 2007- .

¹⁹ Thomas Spencer (1946-), Member in the School of Mathematics, 1984-1985; Professor, 1986-2017; Emeritus Professor, 2017- .

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes, I think it is.

Linda Arntzenius: Is there a question you expected me to ask that I haven't asked? I'm trying to catch anything that you came in with wanting to say?

Roberta Gernhardt: No, not really. No. I think this is – it's been enjoyable going down memory lane. It's interesting; I hope my memory is accurate in terms of timeline and things like that and if you find something out of sync just let me know and I'm happy to go back and revisit it.

Linda Arntzenius: Well the procedure now will be [that] a transcript will be made of the conversation and you will have an opportunity to read it and correct it and expand or, you know add, minimally, you know, not to rewrite the whole thing, but just to make sure that we've captured, and the transcript hasn't picked up anything that isn't what you said. So, all that remains is for me to say thank you very, very much.

Roberta Gernhardt: And thank you too.

Linda Arntzenius: Thank you Roberta.

Roberta Gernhardt: Yes, thanks Linda.

[End of Audio]